1:Barnes E-5 (1946-1949)1954 FR5 Ngoni FR5
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184 geneous or wholly integrated one. It is a plural society, in which
648 as yet the Administration represents the interests, albeit the enlightened interests, of one caste and the Ngoni belong to another. Ngoni share an interest in tobacco booms with their White and Indian neighbours, and they share an interest in the colour bar with distant tribes, but the field of common interest of Northern Rhodesia, or any other major geographical unit, as a multi-racial whole is still small. Ngoni society has not as yet become as wholly integrated into the larger society as have say, the rural districts of Britain, because the well-integrated larger society does not yet exist. Meanwhile the Ngoni still retain a considerable identity of their own, and the chiefs and the Native Authority provide the nucleus for that identity. As such, the posts of chief and to a lesser extent of councillor have more than mere administrative significance. Native [645] Authority officials are still bound by ties of kinship to their people [602] and are still the living embodiment of sentiments of group loyalty and unity. They may have a variety of roles to play which are recognized as distinct, but they still have little private life, in which what they do is of no public concern. In matters of religion Ngoni identify themselves with their co-religionists, dead or living, [771] in other parts of the world, rather than with their pagan forebears. But in political matters Ngoni still identify themselves with Zwangendaba and Shaka and their successors rather than with the British Administration and the Queen of England. They claim the battle of Jericho as one of their victories, but not yet Trafalgar.

There has always been a clear division between the African
202 full-time employees of the Administration and the chiefs. A formal
648 distinction was made as early as 1904 between the Boma messengers, later known as district messengers, attached to the Native Commissioner's office, and the chiefs and district headmen who lived in their own villages. There were also at that time district messengers, later called divisional headmen, who lived in their own villages but received a few shillings a year as stipend and acted as policemen and messengers for the Administration.

Nowadays the Administration employs Africans in a variety
647 of posts, the most important being those of messenger and clerk.
624 The messengers are mainly stationed in Fort Jameson and Fort
648 Manning and visit the rural areas on specific errands or accompanying a District Officer on tour. From time to time messengers are sent to live at compounds scattered through the countryside, where they remain for a few months at a time and act as rural [693] constables, enforcing laws relating to such activities as cultivation

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CHAPTER I

THE ANCESTRAL SPIRITS AND THE ARISTOCRATIC TRADITION

THIS section is not an account of Ngoni religion. It would require a study in itself to examine their beliefs about supernatural beings, their ideas on cosmogony, their concepts of the causes of disaster and sickness, their approach to and practice of forms of magic, and their attitude to witchcraft. Living in Ngoni villages, listening to individuals of different ages discussing prosperity and disaster, the seen and the unseen, the known and the feared, it was clear that it would be difficult to isolate a comprehensive system of beliefs and say that these were distinctively Ngoni beliefs concerning religion and magic and witchcraft. The observer was always aware of the intermingling of ideas and practices from the many Nyasaland tribal peoples who lived side by side and were in constant contact with one another in all those spheres of thought and action which demanded explanation and some remedial or therapeutic treatment. Among the Nyasaland tribes in the 1930's the influence of sixty years of Christian teaching by the missions played an important part, since the missions had introduced western medicine and education as well as a new religion and ethic, and so had influenced both thinking and action among their converts and their families.

In this complex situation it was virtually impossible to say: this is the Chewa religion, this is the Tumbuka cosmogony, this is Ntumba magic. It was nevertheless clear that there was an Ngoni cult of their ancestral spirits, which was not shared, in the form in which they practised it, by any of the neighbouring peoples, and the Ngoni had their own selective methods of relating it to Christian beliefs and practices. One reason why the Ngoni ancestor cult could be singled out as peculiar to them was its foundation in their aristocratic tradition. As long as the Ngoni political and social structure and organization survived, including the reciprocal roles of leading men and important women, the concept of houses with their ownership of cattle, and the role of the *gogo* house in maintaining tradition and carrying out ritual, the performance of the cult of ancestral spirits was assured. The eminent ancestors whose spirits were guarded in a village and who were known and remembered were addressed in times of trouble, and meat was offered to them as a form of sacrifice from the herd of cattle associated with the house to which they had belonged. This section will deal with the cult of ancestral spirits of the Swazi and trans-Zambesi clans who formed the political and social aristocracy. Thus, in the form described here, the cult is

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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565 exclusively related to the aristocratic tradition, and no account will be
769 given or analysis made of ancestor cults practised by those groups in the
771 two Ngoni kingdoms who were not of the leading clans. In the ancestor cult, as it will be described here, the emphasis was always on known and named spirits of the dead, associated with the village where the ritual was performed. In the approach to these known and named spirits—an approach which I have called a cult—there were three essential components: the diviner, the ritual address and the cattle. The diviner's role we shall discuss in Chapter III and the ritual forms of addressing the ancestors in Chapter IV. The Ngoni believed they could not approach their ancestral spirits except through their cattle, which had first to [825] show that the spirits agreed to prayers being made, and the sign was that the beast urinated. The sacrifice of a beast was an integral part of the rite, which was concluded by the suppliants eating the meat together. At no point in their common life did the Ngoni more clearly demonstrate their dependence on their cattle than in the ritual of addressing their ancestral spirits. For this reason, in Chapter II we shall review the place of cattle in Ngoni life and relate it to their role in the ancestor cult.

Ancestral spirits of the Ngoni Paramounts.

643 The reigning Paramount and his predecessors in that office held an
769 unchallenged supremacy in the hierarchy of the Ngoni kingdoms. The
776 Ngoni believed that the line of dead Paramounts similarly led the hierarchy of the ancestral spirits, and that the dead Paramounts had power to help the Ngoni nation in time of need. It was taken for granted that when Paramounts died they would continue to be powerful and held in great respect, and that their position in the spirit world would enable them to influence UMkulumqango, the Great Spirit. This Great Spirit was believed to be the creator of all things and the ultimate source of power, particularly of sending rain, success in war, and deliverance from pestilence; and he was in general regarded as the giver of health and strength to mankind. The Ngoni held that those ancestors who were nearest to the living in time, whose names they knew, possessed less power than the remote ancestors whose names had been forgotten. On the same principle UMkulumqango, the Great Spirit, the originator of all creation, possessed more power than any other being, but, since he was so far removed in time from the living, no one could know his praise-names or his genealogy, and therefore he could not be addressed directly. In the same way the remotest ancestors of the Paramount could not be addressed directly because their praise-names were unknown to living men. Only those direct ancestors of the Paramount, whose names and genealogy and praise-names were known, could be addressed correctly and they could be counted on to use their influence with remoter and more powerful ancestral spirits and with the Great Spirit himself.

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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In these names it is clear that God was known as the Beginning of All Things, the Owner, the One Above All. They knew him as the nourisher of the earth, sending rain and all good things, but they thought that he had little knowledge of his people. Nor could his people know much of him, so they did not worship him himself or speak with him. His character they did not know and so they were not able to praise or glorify him as they were the spirits of their ancestors, whom they knew thoroughly. They knew him from afar and so they could not pray and speak to him.

Since the Ngoni were not able to be at home with UMkulumqango so in worship they sought others known to them that they should tell them the things of their hearts, and these were the spirits of those who had died. At once when one of themselves died, they thought that now he is a spirit with living power greater than he had when a man on the earth, and that he is a spirit who can watch over and protect his relatives on earth, but they also realized that he had power to rebuke and punish. So this spirit was added to the spirits of the tribe who were worshipped. They thought that each clan had its own spirits, stretching back to the beginning of the clan. They believed that the recent spirits received the news from their friends on earth, and handed it on until it arrived at the spirits of very long ago and now forgotten. These then delivered the message to the Creator of all.

Cibambo's main intention in this account of Ngoni worship was to put the ancestor cult in its setting as a means of approach to the creator. He used the Ngoni concept of an intermediary, who was essential in the approach to a Paramount, to argue that the ancestor cult was not necessarily wrong but was an earlier stage towards Christianity. This was a theme constantly expressed in sermons and prayers in Ngoni churches. In the rest of this account he emphasized 'becoming an ancestral spirit', which we shall examine later in its ritual context; allocation of authority among the ancestral spirits; and the fact that prayer and sacrifice, which he called worship, were made chiefly in times of trouble, and not in times of prosperity.

It is legitimate, in view of Dr. Kuper's statement, to ask whether there was a fundamental difference between addressing an ancestral spirit as a go-between and worshipping him. The Ngoni were not trained theologians, except for Christian ministers like Cibambo, but they had a range of philosophical concepts to which it is impossible to do justice in this context. In the prayers which I heard their thoughts were focused on the ancestors whose names they knew and recited. Questioned afterwards, they said that there were other ancestors whose names they did not know, but the ones they named could not fail to be aware of the living, their descendants, since their spirits were guarded in a house and their cattle were sacrificed in the ritual. They therefore directed their worship, or address, to those who were known to them, believing that they would influence the remoter but possibly more powerful spirits whose names were unknown. Spontaneous references to

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5

769 UMkulumqango or other names for the High God were rare. When
771 questioned they said that such a High God existed and the spirits knew him, but they, the living, did not. The Ngoni phrase, *asiyazi*, 'we do not know', and its Nyanja version, *sitingadziwa*, 'we cannot know', were constantly on their lips in discussions on this topic. Among Christians like Cibambo as well as non-Christians like Nzunga, their interest in the ancestor cult was part of maintaining their identity as Ngoni. The neighbouring tribes had other forms of ancestor cults but the Ngoni form brought from the south was distinctive, and many of the concepts and practices were known to the South-eastern Bantu peoples.

The ritual for a new ancestral spirit

761 The Ngoni believed that at the moment of death the spirit left the
775 body. If a sick person fell into a coma and was unconscious for a long time they said that the person had died when the coma began even though they knew he went on breathing. This happened at the death of Bambo Manga when she had periods of unconsciousness before she died. They said that her spirit had left her at the beginning of the last long coma, even though they knew from her pulse and breathing that she was not dead. At the parting of the spirit from the body they had to care for both, in order that the new ancestral spirit might be happy and in the right relationship with the living. Equal importance was attached to caring for the spirit and to caring for the corpse, since the correct performance of ritual had deep significance for the dead and for the living.

763 When the spirit left the body it was believed to go to the bush at the
775 outskirts of the village where the person had been accustomed to go to relieve himself. Between the death of Bambo Manga and the burial, each morning before it was light, the men marched with a dancing step up the path to the bush where she was wont to go, singing a war song dating from trans-Zambesi days which was sung at the sending out of the *impi*. Marching to the bush and singing the war song was one step in bringing the spirit back or, more correctly perhaps, keeping in touch with it so that it should not go too far away. This approach to the spirit between the death and burial was the first of three ritual acts, each called 'bringing back the spirit'. The other two occurred after the first and second ritual shaving.

764 The preparation of the corpse for burial has been described in the first chapter of this section. Those features of Ngoni burial were considered essential for the welfare of the spirit, and were carried out in the majority of funerals which I witnessed, whether the dead person was a Christian or not. An account of the burial of a leading *mukumuzana* in the northern kingdom who was a Christian, given to me by another Christian Ngoni and confirmed by some of the missionaries present at the funeral, emphasized all the distinctive Ngoni elements: the round

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535 challenge is sent from one group of villages to another. And on the day appointed the strangers arrive walking in procession. The girls and women are dressed in their gaudiest clothes, and their heads and arms are decked with bright coloured beads, and the claws of lions and leopards. The lads carry dancing sticks and miniature shields. The strangers open the dance. The girls standing together and holding reed wands in their hands sing in chorus, while the men arranged in a great semi-circle dance and sing. Their dance is wonderfully energetic and graceful, and is executed with a rythm and unison which is fascinating. You can hear a long way off the hundred feet come down on the earth of the kraal with a thud as of one man. When they have danced for about an hour they give way to their rivals. The home villagers step in and dance for another hour. And so on they go from ten o'clock till about four. There is no mingling of men and women. And the whole exercise is chaste, healthful, and beautiful. It is quite the show piece of our village life.

181 And now a few remarks in conclusion on their religious beliefs. I do not intend to say much on this point as one only can get at the inner meaning of their faith after long and careful investigation, and with a thorough knowledge of their language. Their religion 771 was not formulated. If you ask them about it they can tell you little or nothing. They will deny that they knew anything of God until we came. Their observances were scarcely recognised by themselves, they were the spontaneous and almost unconscious expression of a people groping after the unknown God if haply they might find Him. They recognise a spirit who presides over the universe.

776 They have a name for Him which means the great great one. But the ordinary name is the one which south of the Zambesi is used for all white men, and seems also to imply some feeling of wisdom and greatness. But they seem to have no idea of God's imminence in the world. He is rather the mighty far away Spirit to whom men cannot come. Along with this, homage is made to 771 great mountains and ancient trees, and to the strong elemental forces, as thunder and lightening. But this seems to me to be an [177] addition which has come through their residence among the Tumbuka.

769 The great pervading article in their religious life is reverence and dread of the ancestral spirits. The whole land is full of their presence. And offerings are continually made to them to appease